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What Is It With Vietnam?

THE NEWS about South Vietnam can be most confusing these days.

After a briefing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Tuesday by CIA Director John McCone, Chairman J. W. Fulbright had this to say:

"I don't see any sign of another coup."

At that moment a coup was under way in Saigon. The word reached Washington Wednesday morning. According to the Associated Press, there was "little surprise and no sense of crisis."

As the Latins say it, "Que pasa aqui?"

If South Vietnam is our No. 1 problem in foreign relations we seem to have a split-level approach.

While some officials issue soothing statements that things are really not too bad, others assert we are hurtling down a Vietnamese hill without a handbrake.

Former Vice President Richard Nixon declares we risk defeat in a matter of months if policy is not changed. Yet Sen. George Smathers, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, informs a Miami audience that our Vietnam policy is correct and our objectives can and will be achieved.

Indeed, what is going on here?

The new coup in South Vietnam restores Gen. Nguyen Khanh, who stepped aside last October to make way for a civilian government. It restores the status quo ante, yet

there are ominous new developments — rising Buddhist militancy and reports of a dangerous new Communist infiltration from the north.

With our men, our prestige and our national resources deeply committed in Vietnam, the American people deserve more than a babble of contradictory reports and assurances.

They must be told the whole story, the alternatives that face us and the risks involved in each. Then — and only then — when the hard decisions are made, as they must be sooner or later since the headache of Vietnam won't cure itself, we can be counted on to support what is necessary.

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Musical Chairs at Saigon

Fresh from a briefing by the State Department and the CIA, J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, informed correspondents Tuesday afternoon that he foresaw no immediate likelihood of a pending coup d'etat in South Viet Nam. While he spoke Lt Gen Nguyen Khanh and a group of young Vietnamese officers were overthrowing the government headed by Premier Tran Van Huong at Saigon.

For weeks experienced American correspondents in South Viet Nam have been reporting heavy and growing infiltrations of North Viet Nam guerrillas, including some Communist Chinese technicians. These reports, long discounted by American officials, are now admitted to be correct by the

CIA. Is it any wonder Americans here at home are confused?

Gen Khanh's new coup, the seventh in 14 months, has revived military rule at Saigon. It demonstrates again the political chaos and brings to the fore the same Buddhist factions that tumbled his own government only last August. Meantime at Appac, the American-advised government troops have scored the biggest victory in the war.

Washington is probably right in sticking to its basic policy in this latest game of musical chairs at Saigon. But CIA flukes need attention. Far from yielding to pressure for recall of Ambassador Taylor, he should be kept on the job. It is also about time his advice was heeded in Washington.